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ABSTRACT

This guide and accompanying audiotape are intended to be used as part of a series of lessons to involve students in participating in the development of their own Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The guide begins with answers to nine basic questions which address the IEP's purpose, the IEP meeting, and reasons for student participation. Next, suggestions for preparing for the IEP meeting are offered. These include reading their existing IEP; following an 11-step procedure to help identify individual strengths, needs, goals, and objectives; inviting the appropriate people; and practicing what to say. Suggestions are also offered for actual participation in the meeting and for following up after the meeting. A list of note-taking, test-taking, and additional accommodations during the IEP meeting is provided. The audiocasette presents students with disabilities, including learning disability, emotional disturbance, and traumatic brain injury, explaining their role in IEP development and how it enhanced their self-esteem and improved their relationships with teachers. (DB)

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A Student's Guide to the IEP

by

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the National Information Center for
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This *Student's Guide* is the first in a new series for NICHCY. We welcome your comments on this volume and encourage you to suggest future topics for the *Guide*. Please share your ideas with our staff by writing to the Editor.

Published September, 1995

The *Student's Guide* package includes this printed booklet and an accompanying audiocassette. ***Both the booklet and the tape are copyright free.*** Readers are encouraged to copy and share these materials, but please credit the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY).

Welcome to Your IEP !!

This guide will tell you:

- ✓ what an IEP is
- ✓ why you need to be part of your IEP team
- ✓ how to help write your IEP
- ✓ and much, much more !!

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Being a part of the team that writes your IEP
is an exciting, important thing to do.
It's your education — be in on planning it !

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What is an IEP?

1 What is an IEP?

IEP stands for Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is a written document that describes the educational plan for a student with a disability. Your IEP talks about your disability, what skills you need to learn, what you'll do in school this year, what services your school will provide, and where your learning will take place.

2 Why Do Students With Disabilities Need an IEP?

First, it's the law. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires each student with disabilities who receives special education services to have an IEP — an educational program written just for him or her.

Second, the IEP helps the school meet your special needs. It also helps you plan educational goals for yourself. That is why it is called an IEP — because it is an *individualized* education plan.

3 What is the Purpose of an IEP?

The purpose of the IEP is to make sure that everyone — you, your family, and school staff — knows what your educational program will be this year.

4 Where is the IEP Developed?

The IEP is developed during an IEP meeting, where the people who are concerned with your education meet, discuss, and develop your IEP goals and objectives for the next year.

5 Who Comes to the IEP Meeting?

Your meeting can be attended by:

- You
- Your parents
- Your teachers
- Your therapists
- Your counselor
- Your principal
- Others you or the school think can help plan your program.

How Often is the IEP Meeting Held?

The law requires that your IEP is reviewed and revised at least once a year. This means attending at least one IEP meeting each year. However, you, your parents, or the school can ask for more IEP meetings, if any of you think that it's necessary to take another look at your IEP.

How Long Does an IEP Meeting Last?

Approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Why Should I Participate in the IEP Meeting?

It's *your* educational program everyone will be discussing in the meeting. Your opinions are an important part of this discussion.

What Should I Do if I Want to Participate in Developing my IEP?

There are five basic steps:

1. Talk to your parents and teachers.
2. Review last year's IEP.
3. Think about your strengths and weaknesses in school.
4. Write your goals for this school year.
5. Practice what you want to say at the meeting.

More details on these steps are given in this booklet. Read on.

How Do I Develop My IEP?

What to Do Before the IEP Meeting

1 Tell your family and teachers that you are interested in participating in your next IEP meeting. It is important that you have the support of your parents and teachers, because they will play a major role in helping you.

2 Ask your parents or teachers when your next IEP is due to be revised. Write the date below.

Next IEP Date:

_____

3 Ask your parents or teachers for a copy of your current IEP.

4 Read your IEP carefully. The IEP has different sections. These sections are listed in the box on the right. Look at the information in the box. Look at your IEP. Can you find the different sections or this information in your IEP?

5 Ask your parents or teachers to explain what is written in your IEP, section-by-section. Ask questions. Make sure you understand the sections and information in your IEP.

Sections of the IEP

By law, your IEP must include certain information about you. This information is usually organized into the sections listed below. When you look at your current IEP, you will probably see these sections or information. The new IEP you help develop will also have these sections or information.

- *Current levels of educational performance:* This section includes precise information about how you are doing in school and sometimes in other aspects of your life
- What *special education and related services* the school will provide to you
- How much of your school day will be spent in *regular education classrooms*
- *Goals* for the year
- *Short-term objectives* (the individual steps that make up the annual goals)
- *When* the school will start providing services to you *and how long* the services are expected to last
- How the school will find out if you are accomplishing the goals and objectives set for you (called "*evaluation criteria*")
- *Assistive technology devices* (such as a computer or communication board) the school will provide to help you
- *Transition services* you need to get ready for life after finishing high school.

Writing the IEP

1 You'll need several sheets of clean paper, and a pencil or pen. (If you like using a computer, that's fine, too. So is a tape recorder! You can also have a friend take notes for you.)

2 Start by describing your disability.

What is your disability called?

How does your disability affect you in school and at home? (For example, what things in school are harder because of your disability?)

What do you think is important for others to know about your disability?

If you aren't sure what to say, think about what the students on the tape had to say. How did they describe their disabilities?

3 Look at your old IEP goals and objectives. Do you think you have met those goals and objectives? (This means you can do the things listed there.) Put a check next to the goals and objectives you have met.

4 What goals or objectives have you NOT met? Write these down on paper. They may be important to include in your new IEP.

5 What are your strengths and needs in each class or subject? Make a list. This can be hard to do. Here are some suggestions to help you:

- Start with clean sheets of paper. Title one sheet "Strengths" and another sheet "Needs."
- Ask yourself the questions on the next page (see the box). These can help you think about your strengths and needs. Write your ideas down on your "Strengths" and "Needs" worksheets.

  Hints: If you're not sure how to answer a question, look at the examples given. Also, think about what the students on the tape had to say. How did they describe their strengths and needs? What accommodations did they ask for? What did they say they needed to work on in school?

6 Show the goals in your old IEP to your parents and your teachers. Do they think you have met these goals? What goals haven't you met? Add their ideas to the list you started in Step 4 above.

7 Ask your teachers what they believe your strengths and needs are in each class or subject. Write their ideas down.

8 Develop new goals and objectives for this year, using the list of strengths and needs you and your parents and teachers developed.

9 Describe the accommodations you may need in each class to meet these new goals and objectives. (See page 10 for a list of common accommodations.)

10 Think about your plans for the future and what you'll do after you've finished high school. Talk with your parents and teachers about what you should be doing this year to get ready. This is called *transition planning*.

11 Work with your parents and teachers to write a draft IEP document that includes all the information above. Make a copy for yourself to take to the IEP meeting. Make copies for everyone else who will be at the meeting.

Ask Yourself . . .:

- *What classes do you take?* Make a list.
- *Which is your best class?*
- *What can you do well in this class?*

  These are your **strengths**. (Example: read, write, listen, work in groups, work alone, draw, do your homework...)

- *What helps you do well?*

  These can also be your strengths. (Examples: Your interest in the subject, your memory, patience, determination, effort, the help of others (what, specifically?), the way the teacher presents new information...)

- *What class is hardest for you?*
- *What's the hardest part of this class for you?*

  These are the areas you need to work on during the school year. (Examples: Paying attention, reading the book, listening, staying in the seat, remembering new information, doing homework, doing work in groups...)

- *What accommodations would help you do better in this class?*

  Look at the list of accommodations on page 10. Write down the ones you think would help you in this hard class.

- *What do you need to work on in your other classes?*

  Go class by class and make a list of what is hard for you in each one. Be specific — for example, in math class, you might find "fractions," "word problems," or some other math skill very difficult.

- *What accommodations would help you in each class?*

  For each class, list what accommodations, if any, would help you.

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Getting Ready for the IEP Meeting

1 Talk to your special education teacher about setting a time, date, and place for the IEP meeting. Make a list of who should be there.

2 Once the meeting is set, send everyone on your list an invitation like the example below.

An Invitation

Please come to my IEP meeting and share your ideas.

Date: Wednesday, October 23rd
Time: 2:30 p.m.
Place: Meeting Room 4

Signed,

Your Name

p.s. If you cannot attend this meeting, please let me know when we can meet to talk about my IEP. Thank you.

3 To get ready for your IEP meeting, it's a good idea to think about what you want to say. At the meeting, you'll want to be able to:

- describe your disability
- talk about your strengths and needs
- describe your learning style (how you learn best and what gets in the way of your learning)
- tell team members the accommodations you need and why you need them
- describe any medications you are taking or medical needs you have (if you wish to share this information)
- list your educational goals and objectives
- talk about your transition plan for the future.

4 It's also a good idea to practice what you want to say. Practice with your parents, a classmate, or a teacher. [Parents need to know what your goals are before the meeting, so they can support your decisions.]

5 One week before the IEP meeting, you may wish to send out reminders to the people who will be attending: your parents, teachers, counselor, principal, and others who have been invited. The note can be simple, such as the example below.

Just to Remind You...

I am looking forward to seeing you at my IEP meeting.

Wednesday, October 23rd
2:30 p.m., Meeting Room 4

Signed,
Your Name

Participating in the IEP Meeting

1 Make sure everyone knows each other. You may want to introduce them or have them introduce themselves.

2 Speak up and maintain good eye contact.

List of Accommodations

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is another important federal law for people with disabilities. This law states that reasonable accommodations must be made. But what are reasonable accommodations?

Reasonable accommodations are things the school or your teacher can do to make it easier for you to learn — adapting or adjusting what you're learning or how they're teaching.

Some common accommodations schools make for students with disabilities are listed below.

Note-taking Accommodations

- Use a tape recorder in the classroom
- Use another student's notes
- Have a notetaker in the class
- Use teacher's notes
- Use computer or typwriter

Test Taking Accommodations

- Extended time on test
- Take test in quiet area
- Have test read to you
- Take test orally

Additional Accommodations

- Use textbooks-on-tape
- Have extra set of books for home and school
- Restroom use (medical accommodations)
- Use a calculator or dictionary in class
- Have additional time to get from class to class
- Have seating in front of class
- Have extended time to take PSAT or SAT

3 Talk about the things you practiced, including:

- your disability
- the strengths and needs you have in each of your classes
- your learning style
- the accommodations you need and why you need them
- your goals and objectives for the next year
- your transition plans for the future.

4 Ask for additional suggestions and comments on your IEP content. Be sure everyone has a chance to talk and share their ideas.

5 Listen to ideas and suggestions from the other IEP team members. If you don't understand something, ask for an explanation.

6 Share your feelings about the goals and objectives the other team members suggest. Try to come to agreement about what goals and objectives are important to list in your IEP. (If you cannot finish in the time you have, set a time and date for another meeting.)

7 Write down (or have someone else write down) everything that's been decided, so that a final IEP can be written.

8 When the meeting is over, thank everyone for attending.

After the IEP Meeting

1 Ask for a copy of the final IEP document. Go over it to be sure you understand what it says.

2 Keep this copy of the IEP, so you can look over it whenever you need to.

3 Work to accomplish the goals and objectives in your IEP.

4 Review your IEP throughout the year. If anything needs to be changed — for example, you've met goals in a class and want to write new goals, or you need more help with a subject — ask your special education teacher to schedule another IEP meeting.

A Final Word...

You have planned for your high school education and thought about your future. It begins today. Good luck!

The *Student Guide* is published once a year. NICHCY also disseminates other materials and can respond to individual requests for information. For further information or assistance, or to receive a NICHCY *Publications List*, contact NICHCY, P.O. Box 1492, Washington, DC 20013. Telephone: 1-800-695-0285 (Voice/TT) and (202) 884-8200 (Voice/TT).

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